

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT THE VALUE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

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FRAMING THE TOPIC

The Problem of Play:

Play is a central, defining concept for many children's museums, but it is also problematic.

It is not well-understood, despite existing research.

It is undervalued at a policy level.

It is difficult to define.

Our Question:

How do children's museums position themselves and their work around play?

RAISE OF HANDS

- Thinking about your museum's mission, does it include the word "play"?
- Is play implied in other terms?

DISCUSSION GROUPS

- When was the last time you were part of a conversation amongst staff at your museum that was even loosely about play?

[10 Minutes]

DISCUSSION GROUPS

- Does your museum have what you would consider to be a definition of play?
 - If so, what is that definition? Is it written down?
 - If not, how would you describe the way your museum talks about what play is?

[10 Minutes]

DISCUSSION GROUPS

- What is the relationship between play and learning?
(from your institution's perspective)

[10 Minutes]

**CHILDREN'S MUSEUM
RESEARCH NETWORK
STUDY FINDINGS**

BACKGROUND

- What is the Children's Museum Research Network? (CMRN)



- First research study: Learning frameworks within the network
- Play emerged as a key issue
- Research question for the second study:

How do children's museums position themselves and their work around play?

STUDY METHODS

- Included 48 museums across the United States
- Sizes, locations, budgets closely matched to ACM membership
- Semi-structured telephone interviews with senior staff
- Interview questions related to:
 - Visibility & role of play in mission statement
 - Definitions of play used internally
 - Beliefs about connections between play and learning
 - And other topics (eg, benefits of play, measures of play)
- Research Network collaboratively analyzed responses

VISIBILITY OF PLAY IN MISSION STATEMENTS

- Majority of museums said play was part of their mission
 - “Play” is in mission (57%)
 - “Play” is in other statement (14%)
 - Play is implied (31%)

- Majority said play was very important to their mission.
On a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important)
 - 7: 84%
 - 6: 6%
 - 5: 10%

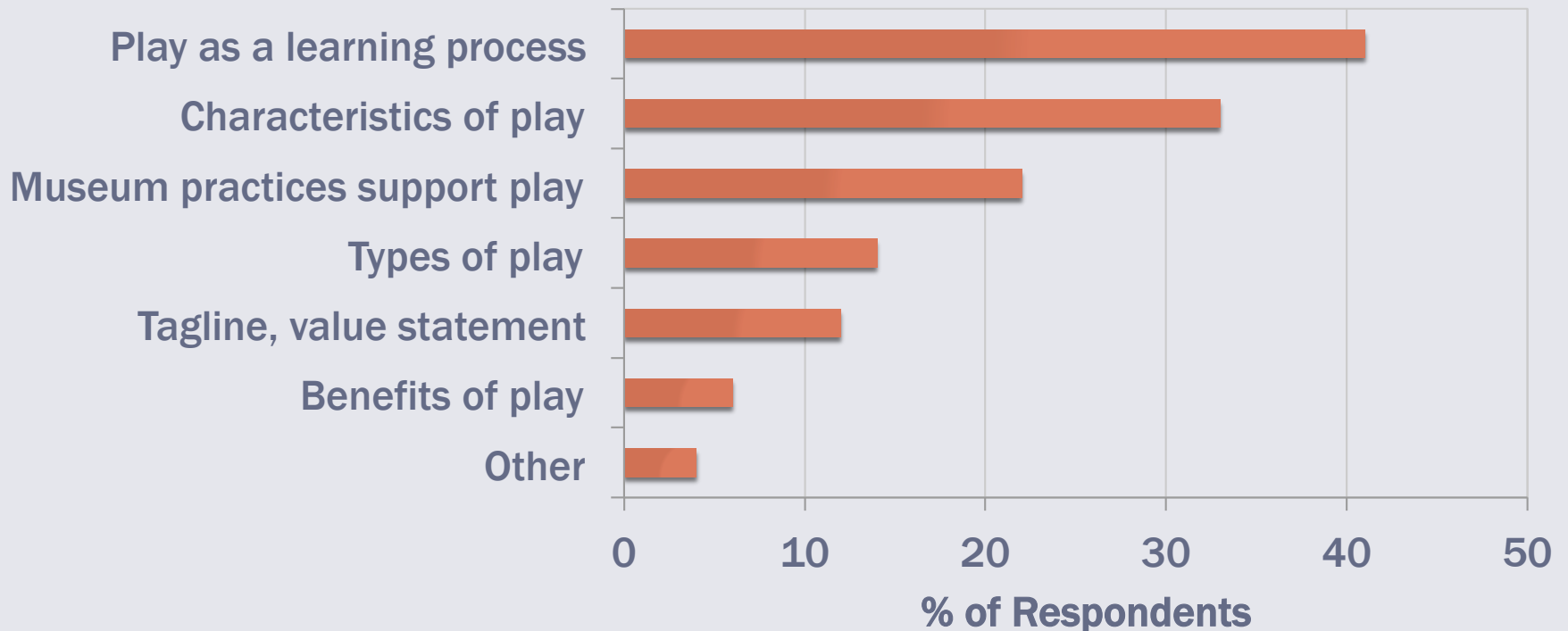
ROLE OF PLAY IN MISSION/ACTIVITIES



DEFINITIONS OF PLAY

- 29% of museums had definitions of play used internally
- 10% had written definitions

Nature of Definitions (written or not)



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAY AND LEARNING



SUMMARY

- Majority of museums said play was important to their missions.
- Most did not have a definition of play that they used internally.
- Even so, there was an underlying consensus about play's role as a learning process.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Summary of Study Results: “Practitioners’ Reflections on Play at their Institutions (SIG#2)” [*Available via InterActivity website after the conference*]
- “Building a Children’s Museum Research Network,” *Hand to Hand*, Spring 2016.
- Luke, Letourneau, Rivera, Brahms, & May. 2017. “Play and Children’s Museums: A path forward or a point of tension?” *Curator* 60(1): 37-46. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cura.12186/abstract>
- CAISE and IMLS blog posts about the Network:
<http://www.informalscience.org/news-views/analyzing-learning-frameworks-childrens-museums>
<https://www.imls.gov/news-events/upnext-blog/2017/02/exploring-learning-value-childrens-museums-through-research-network>

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